

Alexander | Democrats holding up Norris, Richardson appointments

Lamar Alexander, Guest columnist

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Tennesseans have a right to ask, “Why hasn’t the United States Senate confirmed President Trump’s nominations of Mark Norris and Eli Richardson to be federal District Court judges?” After all, the president sent their names to the United States Senate more than a year ago.

I can assure you, the answer is that the delay has nothing to do with Mark Norris or Eli Richardson, and everything to do with the determination of Senate Democrats to obstruct and delay, as much as possible, President Trump’s nominees.

Both Norris and Richardson are well-respected Tennesseans who have been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and who I am confident will receive the votes of the majority of the Senate. The problem is, even though Democrats can’t ultimately defeat these nominations, they’re delaying their approval by requiring the Senate to take a maximum amount of time to consider even less significant nominations and those that are not controversial.

For example, recently the Senate took two votes to confirm Elad Roisman to the Securities and Exchange Commission with votes of 83-14 and 85-14.

Norris and Richardson are moving steadily up the list of judicial nominees to be considered, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says they are certain to be confirmed before the end of the year. But that is no excuse for such a long delay.

One reason that delay is indefensible is the workload in the Nashville and Memphis courts. In the Middle District of Tennessee there was a judicial emergency, until Judge Chip Campbell was confirmed. Prior to his confirmation, there were only two full-time district court judges and federal judges from across Tennessee and other states were volunteering to help with the caseload.

“Justice delayed is justice denied” is a well-known maxim, and Tennessee is not the only place that the Democrats are delaying justice.

Norris and Richardson are just two of 36 District Court judges who have been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, but have not been considered by Senate. That's 5 percent of all district court judgeships across the country just sitting on the Senate executive calendar waiting to be considered.



Nashville attorney Eli Richardson *(Photo: submitted)*

Mark Norris is serving as majority leader of the Tennessee State Senate, has been elected chairman of the Council of State Governments, and has been an advocate for and a champion of federalism and for the separation of powers. He is a citizen, a lawyer and a legislator, and I have known him for many years -- since I was the Governor of Tennessee.

Eli Richardson's expansive professional experience – as a litigator, FBI special agent and federal prosecutor in the Middle District of Tennessee, where he was appointed the office's Criminal Chief – makes him uniquely qualified to serve as a district court judge.

I worked in a bipartisan way when Barack Obama was president to change Senate rules so district judges could be voted up or down in a timely way. That rules change expired at the end of 2014, and the Democrats have refused to do the same for President Trump and future presidents. Period.

There's really no excuse for a delay for the sake of delay when litigants are waiting to be heard, and courts are overcrowded and careers of two good men are being put on hold while the Democrats play games in Washington.

I look forward to the confirmation of Mark Norris and Eli Richardson, and I know they will serve Tennesseans with integrity and in a fair and impartial manner.

Their patience is more than Democrats deserve, but our country will be better for their service.

Lamar Alexander represents Tennessee in the U.S. Senate.



Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee. (Photo: Manuel Balce Ceneta, AP)